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RAMADÂN

Rules and Related Issues

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Significance of Fasting

Fasting is a very significant form of worship in Islam, for which it was included as one of the five pillars of Islam. Allâh's Messenger ﷺ said:

«يُنْبِئُ الْإِسْلَامُ عَلَى خَمْسٍ شَهَادَةِ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَأَنَّ مُحَمَّدًا رَسُولُ اللَّهِ، وَإِقَامِ الصَّلَاةِ، وَإِيتَاءِ الزَّكَاةِ، وَحَجِّ الْبَيْتِ، وَصَوْمِ رَمَضَانَ».

“Islam is based on five (pillars): testifying to the fact that none has the right to be worshipped but Allâh and that Muhammad is Allâh's Messenger; the establishment of the ritual prayer; the payment of *Zakât*; performing *Hajj* (pilgrimage) to the House [of Allâh (*Ka'bah*)]; and fasting during the month of *Ramadân*.” (*Al-Bukhâri* and *Muslim*)

Definition of Fasting

Fasting literally means abstention. In Islamic terminology, fasting is a kind of worship to Allâh in which every Muslim obeys Him and abstains from all things that nullify the validity of the fast from dawn to sunset. There are certain things that invalidate the fast, such as eating, drinking, sexual intercourse with one's wife, etc. However, although these things are normally permissible, they are forbidden while fasting. Therefore, fasting is the act of one seeking the Pleasure of Allâh, by adhering to His Order to abstain from such restricted things from dawn to sunset.

Essence of Fasting

Describing the very rules and issues of fasting in the Noble Qur'ân, Allâh concludes:

﴿لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ﴾

“You may become the pious.” (2:183).

It is obvious from this Statement of Allâh the Most High that the objective of fasting is extremely important and of utmost benefit. Piety signifies that one fears Allâh and is conscious of Him in all matters. Before performing any act, one has to be sure whether it is permissible or illicit, legitimate or forbidden, and whether it pleases Allâh or displeases Him.

How can this kind of piety be achieved by fasting? In the case of a Muslim who really observes fasting, why should he abstain from eating, drinking, and having sexual intercourse with his wife — although he is confined to his private room where none can see him or punish him for any violation? The answer is very clear, it is because Allâh has prohibited him from these things while fasting. Thus, by exerting continually for one month, everyone must endeavor to fill their heart with perfect piety and sincerity. Accordingly, the fear and consciousness of Allâh becomes intrinsic in his heart. Moreover, one has to firmly believe that, in a state of fasting, if Allâh has ordered him to rid himself of even permissible things temporarily, then how can it be lawful for him to ever commit acts that are permanently forbidden by Allâh? In other words, if he really desires to attain the absolute Pleasure of Allâh, then why would he commit any act of disobedience to Him? This is the lesson of fasting.

Miscellaneous Explications for Diversified Issues

1. Fasting is compulsory upon every adult, sane and healthy Muslim.
2. It is not obligatory for minor children to fast. However, it is preferable to encourage them to fast as long as they are able to do so, in order for them to become accustomed to it from an early age. It will also help them to realize that it will be mandatory for them to observe once they become mature. As far as performing the prayer is concerned, their guardians are required to encourage them to perform it when they are seven years old. At ten years of age, they are required to command them to perform it, even giving them a light spanking if necessary. This will teach them the significance of offering the prayer from childhood, and that it will be obligatory for them once they become adults.
3. A person who is chronically ill and fears that by fasting, he will suffer further difficulty, or make his illness worse, then it is not necessary for him to fast. Rather he has to make up for those days once he is relieved.
4. The same rule is true for women who are pregnant, or breast feeding, or if she fears for herself, or for her infant. Such decisions are to be based upon the expert advice of an honest doctor. They are permitted to break the fast, but later, they have to make up for such missed fasts.
5. A woman in her menstruation or postnatal period, is exempt from fasting. Menstruation means her monthly period. The postnatal period occurs after childbirth, lasting until the moment the bleeding ceases, the maximum period being forty days. Whenever her bleeding ceases, her cleanliness begins, then she takes a complete bath, and

performs the prayer or observes fasting accordingly. It is necessary for those who were in menstruation or postnatal period to make up for the missed fasts.

6. Those who are physically incapable of fasting, such as the chronically or terminally ill, or those suffering from senility, such are permitted to break the fast. However, later they have to feed a poor person for every missed day. In other words, their expiation of feeding the needy is equal to observing the fast.
7. Similarly, one who is insane, in a coma, unconscious, or very old — having lost the faculty of sensation, or those who suffer from psychosis or other mental disorders. These are exempt from the fast.
8. Those in extreme conditions or in emergency situations, such as those swimming into deep bodies of water or rescuing victims of fire, they are also permitted to break their fast. This is especially the case when their life saving mission is impossible while fasting. However, they have to make up for these fasts later.
9. A traveler, who suffers from the length of the journey, is also allowed to break his fast, but he has to make up for his missed days. Similarly, those involved in the permanent duty of continuous traveling, such as drivers of railway and bus transportation, or those executives who travel from one city to another every day. These are also permitted to break their fast, but they have to be made up for later. Such eligibility applies whether their journey is frequent or not. Nevertheless, they are not completely excused from fasting, rather it is obligatory for them to complete the fasts of Ramadân. If they are not able to observe fasting in Ramadân due to their journey, they must make up for those missed days outside of Ramadân.

The Essential Elements of the Fast

1. The Intention

In the case of the obligatory fast, the intention must be made the night before the fast begins. Allâh's Messenger ﷺ said:

«مَنْ لَمْ يُجْمَعْ الصَّيَّامُ قَبْلَ الْفَجْرِ فَلَا صِيَامَ لَهُ».

“Whoever does not determine to fast before the dawn, his fasting is null and void.” (*Ahmad* and the Four *Sunan* Compilers, graded authentic by Shaikh Al-Albani in *Sahih Al-Jami' As-Saghir*, No. 6539)

Every Muslim must make his intention at night to observe his fasting from early morning the next day, in addition to taking his pre-dawn meal (*Suhoor*). The meaning of the intention is that he is determined to fast the next day. Such intention need not be spoken aloud, as it is in reality an act of the heart, which does not involve the tongue. Additionally, there are no narrations stating that the Prophet ﷺ uttered the intention aloud. Some textual wordings for the above intention are printed in some of the traditional calendars such as:

وَبَصَوْمٍ غَدٍ نَوَيْتُ مِنْ شَهْرِ رَمَضَانَ

“I intended to observe tomorrow's fasting for the month of Ramadân,”

These are categorically baseless and authentically groundless. Therefore, the use of such audible wordings is sinful, since it is not confirmed from the Prophet ﷺ.

2. Duration of the Fast

Its duration is from dawn to sunset. Before the dawn (*Fajr*),

one has to take his pre-dawn meal (*Suhoor*) and abstain from everything that invalidates the fast until sunset.

3. Pre-dawn Meal (*Suhoor*)

Some people are not serious about the pre-dawn meal, since either they have an adequate dinner at night before going for a deep sleep, or they have a meal during the middle of the night. Either choice is wrong. Allâh's Messenger ﷺ said:

«فَضْلُ مَا بَيْنَ صِيَامِنَا وَصِيَامِ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ أَكْلَةُ السَّحَرِ».

“The difference between our fasting and that of the People of the Scriptures is the *Suhoor* (Pre-dawn meal).” (*Muslim*)

This is because the People of the Book do not eat the pre-dawn meal, while Muslims regularly take the pre-dawn meal. Therefore, taking the pre-dawn meal is essential. It is enough to eat even a piece of a date, or to drink a mouthful of water. This will bring the blessing, and help one's physical strength, two things, which are needed very much for the fast. Therefore, Allâh's Messenger ﷺ has signified it by describing the pre-dawn meal as a “blessed provision.” (*Abu Dâwud*)

In another *Hadith*, Allâh's Messenger ﷺ said:

«السَّحُورُ أَكْلُهُ بَرَكَةٌ فَلَا تَدْعُوهُ وَلَوْ أَنْ يَجْرَعَ أَحَدُكُمْ جُرْعَةً مِنْ مَاءٍ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ وَمَلَائِكَتَهُ يُصَلُّونَ عَلَى الْمُتَسَحِّرِينَ».

“Taking the pre-dawn meal in Ramadân is a blessing, so do not leave it, even by drinking a mouthful of water. For Allâh the Noble and the Mighty, and His angels send blessing over those who have taken the pre-dawn meal.” (*Ahmad*, graded authentic by Shaikh Al-Albani in *Sahih Al-Jami' As-*

'Allâh and His angels send blessing' signifies that Allâh sends His Grace, Honor, Blessings, and Mercy on him, and His angels ask Allâh to bless and forgive him.

Similarly, Allâh's Messenger ﷺ used to postpone his pre-dawn meal until just before the dawn. Imitating the way of the Prophet ﷺ and following his practices is meritorious and beneficial, especially for those fasting. For instance, one who eats his pre-dawn meal later would not only be more energetic and join the congregational prayer of *Fajr* earlier, but he also can minimize the time between the beginning and end of the fast. In this way he will experience more ease and comfort. For this reason, the Prophet ﷺ has forbidden fasting continuously without eating or drinking (beyond one day).

"Allâh's Messenger ﷺ forbade fasting continuously (beyond one day). The people said (to him), "But you practice it?" He said, "I am not like you, for I am given food and drink (by Allâh)." (*Al-Bukhâri* and *Muslim*)

4. Hasten to break the Fasting

Hastening to breaking the fast, without delay is from the *Sunnah* of the Prophet ﷺ. Hastening means to break the fast immediately after sunset without any further delay. Some people are hesitant to break the fast, even after the sunset is finished, waiting well into dusk, or until the deep darkness of the nightfall when the stars become visible. However, this was the practice of the Jews and Christians during the Prophet's era. Therefore, he commanded every Muslim to contradict the Jews and Christians and hasten to break the fast immediately after sunset. Allâh's Messenger ﷺ said:

« لَا يَزَالُ النَّاسُ بِخَيْرٍ مَا عَجَّلُوا الْفِطْرَ ».

"People will continue to adhere to good as long as they hasten to break the fast." (*Al-Bukhâri* and *Muslim*)

5. How to break the Fast

Narrated Anas:

كَانَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ﷺ يُفْطِرُ عَلَى رُطَبَاتٍ قَبْلَ أَنْ يُصَلِّيَ، فَإِنْ لَمْ تَكُنْ رُطَبَاتٌ فَتَمْرَاتٍ، فَإِنْ لَمْ تَكُنْ تَمْرَاتٌ حَسَا حَسَوَاتٍ مِنْ مَاءٍ.

"Allâh's Messenger ﷺ used to break his fast before offering *Maghrib* (sunset) prayer with three fresh dates; if there were no fresh dates, he would eat three dry dates; and if there were no dry dates, he would take three draughts of water." (*Abu Dâwud* and others, graded authentic by Shaikh Al-Albani in *Sahih Al-Jami' As-Saghir*, No. 4995)

Consider how far our practice is from that of our Prophet ﷺ! In our fast-breaking menu, there are all kinds of fruits and additional items. These items are fried or cooked with a lot of herbs and spices. This may result in causing an upset stomach, which may eventually result in ill health. Instead, we have to adopt a more moderate and comfortable way of breaking our fast by which a rich reward in the Hereafter and a physical advantage in this world will also be achieved.

6. Times of responding to the Supplication

Those believers who strive and control themselves, abstaining from those things restricted, such as food, drink, and sexual desire, all day long, to attain the Pleasure of Allâh, will definitely have a special status with Allâh. Thus, responding to his invocation when breaking his fast